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ABSTRACT

Although world history and global studies programs in U.S. public schools have expanded in recent years, teaching about India and South Asia has remained insufficient. As a result, students often develop cultural misunderstandings and false stereotypes. India, as a focus of study, provides students with the opportunity to examine an ancient civilization, its advancements, and the continuing struggle for improved conditions of existence in a 20th century developing nation. This ERIC Digest examines: (1) the importance of teaching about India; (2) the placement of teaching about India in the elementary and secondary school curriculums; and (3) strategies for teaching about India. This digest recommends that instruction begin in the elementary grades and continue systematically through secondary school and that curriculum about India include: (1) a chronology of the history; (2) geography and geographical relationships; (3) its relationships with other countries; (4) biographical profiles of leaders; and (5) comparisons of religions. Thirteen references are included. (JHP)

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Teaching About India

by S. Rex Morrow

"East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet" was a nineteenth-century statement by Rudyard Kipling, a British writer and soldier in India. In today's world of highly complex technological interdependence, India still appears to most Americans as an incomprehensible culture. Although world history and global studies programs in American public schools have expanded in recent years—especially the study of East Asia—the treatment of India and South Asia have remained insufficient, laden with cultural misunderstandings and stereotypes. This deplorable situation must be remedied. India, as a focus of study, provides students with the opportunity to examine an ancient civilization, the marvels of technology and advancement during later eras, and the continued struggle for improved conditions of human existence in a developing nation in the twentieth century. This ERIC Digest examines (1) the importance of teaching about India, (2) the place of India in the school curriculum, and (3) strategies for teaching about India.

Why Is It Important to Teach About India? India, a significant area of Asia in the past, is a very important part of today's world. Therefore, the peoples and places of India should be emphasized in the social studies curriculum. Consider the following statements, which justify a prominent place for India in the social studies education of young Americans.

1. India is the second most populated nation in the world. With over 700 million people, one out of five persons on this planet is from South Asia.
2. India's geographic position places the country strategically in control of the Indian Ocean basin. India is bordered by the Arabian Sea on the west, the Bay of Bengal on the east, the Indian Ocean on the south, and the Himalayan Mountains on the north.
3. More than 4,000 years ago, civilization flourished in the Indus River Valley at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. Later, Indo-European invaders established their own civilization, which contributed greatly to human knowledge in several fields of learning. Of note is the concept of zero, which Indians passed on to the Arabs, from whom Europeans learned it.
4. India is the source of several religions. Hinduism is a world religion practiced by more than 700 million believers and dates back more than 3,000 years. Although most Hindus can be found in South Asia, the practice of Hinduism is worldwide. Also dating back to the ancient period was the formation of Buddhism, a religion that eventually spread throughout Asia. Other religions that developed in India include Jainism and Sikhism.
5. People of India have contributed significantly to various forms of art. Great works of world literature, from the ancient *Bhagavad Gita* to the writings of Mahatma Gandhi have become internationally appreciated. Many Indian art forms—sculpture, music, and dance—have a global audience.
6. India has become the principal leader of the world-wide "Non-Alignment Movement." This movement includes nations that seek to remain neutral in conflicts between superpowers such as the Soviet Union and the United States. India's voice in this movement has been resonate in demanding broader participation by developing countries in world affairs.

Where Does India Belong in the Curriculum? Teaching about India should begin in the elementary school and continue systematically through the secondary school. However, high-quality materials about India, whether in the ancient or modern periods, are very scarce. Although India is the second most populated nation in the world, few students in the United States can identify the capital (New Delhi) or locate the nation on a map.

India is rarely introduced into the social studies curriculum prior to the sixth or seventh grades, and then only in reference to the ancient civilizations of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, the invasions by Indo-Europeans, and early British colonial rule of India. Little is mentioned about the society, the various cultures of this large area, and the many contributions made to humanity.

Four recommendations can be made about the proper place of India in the elementary school curriculum. **First**, highlight and showcase contributions the peoples of India have made in the arts and sciences.

Second, teach the geography of India in concert with its history. India is the largest country of the South Asian subcontinent. Its terrain, climate, and natural resources have greatly influenced conditions of life and development of cultures in the vast expanse of India.

Third, teach about India as a multicultural, multiethnic nation. India is a nation with a multitude of cultural differences. Many Indians are descendents of Indo-European or Aryan peoples; some are descendents of Dravidians, others are descended from peoples of central Asian or southeast Asian backgrounds. In addition, a small number of modern European settlers call India their home. Linguistically, there are more than 120 Indian dialects. Although Hindi is the state-adopted language, many Indian states challenge this selection and continue to teach the regionally prevalent language. The English language is taught in schools throughout India; and among educated people, English is the unofficial language of the sub-continent. Religion is also a vital part of India's multicultural profile. India is predominantly Hindu, about 80 percent of the nation. But there are large minorities of Sikhs and Muslims. Smaller minorities of Christians (Catholics and Protestants), Jains,

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and Buddhists also are found in India.

Fourth, teach about India as an emerging nation in a complex, interdependent world community. Since the 1960s, India has been a member of the atomic community. Now, India must choose directions for technological growth that will provide security and progress for the world's second most populated nation, and the world's largest republic.

What Teaching Strategies Might Be Used to Improve Instruction on India? Emphasize chronology in teaching the history of India to show how institutions and traditions developed and how ancient practices persist today. For example, caste has its roots in India's ancient history; yet today although it is officially outlawed, many villages still engage in an active lifestyle governed by the caste system.

Teach geography and geographical relationships. India has many geographically distinctive regions; how mankind exists under these conditions provides for unique and vivid glimpses of life in India. For example, the monsoon season is more than just the advent of frequent rain, it is a season of rejuvenation and rebirth, and many customs in India relate to the coming of the monsoon.

Today, India is a world leader in the Non-Alignment Movement. Take advantage of India's predominance in this area by examining the Non-Alignment policy in current world affairs and, when possible, India's role in international organizations. Major national newspapers, including the *Christian Science Monitor*, should provide current information on India's role in the movement. What are the policies and primary goals of this global movement? What are India's objectives in relations with the West European nations, the United States, and the Soviet Union?

Include biographical profiles of Indians who have recognized international status. Examine early important historical, even legendary, figures like Siddartha Gautama (called Buddha), Tamerlane, and Akbar. And study contemporary twentieth-century figures, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Indira and Rajiv Gandhi.

Indeed, many educators may help their students to understand the major role India has played in world civilization by exploring India as the birthplace of great religions. Today, more than 700 million followers of Hinduism worship predominantly in South Asia, while Buddhism, which was born in India, has more than one billion followers throughout much of Asia, although a small minority within India itself. Other religions born in India include Sikhism and Jainism. Comparing and contrasting these religions and their principles can be beneficial in introducing varied cultural perspectives. Indeed the use of excerpts from the Hindu *Mahabharata* or the *Bhagavad-Gita* or the Buddhist *Four Noble Truths* can be valuable resources in learning the cultural and intellectual spirit of India. Students should be encouraged to use many of the primary sources of literature available on the people, history, and cultures of India.

References and ERIC Resources

The following list of resources includes references used to prepare the Digest. The items followed by an ED number are in the ERIC system and are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, write EDRS, 3900 Wheeler Avenue, Alexandria, Virginia 22304; telephone numbers are 703-823-0500 and 800-227-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number are annotated monthly in CIJE (*Current Index to Journals in Education*), which is available in most libraries. EJ documents are not available through EDRS; however, they can be located in the journal section of most libraries by using the bibliographic information provided below.

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